9: Luke G-5 (ca. 1920-ca. 1960) 1960
EZ6 Malta EZ6

CHAPTER XVIII

Old Survivals in Modern Malta

MALTA OCCUPIES A PLACE OF ITS OWN IN THE OLD WORLD not only by reason of the length and unusual character of its annals, not only by reason of the tremendous range of its architectural monuments. It does so because it combines with these features the circumstance that it is the home of a separate race, the smallest of European peoples.

There are, it is true, four independent states in Europe of lesser size than Malta, but the inhabitants of these states do not form distinct racial stocks, nor have they their own languages. The Maltese are the smallest nation with the longest history, and their islands are a microcosm, self-contained. Not only has Malta its own tongue. It has its own University—the oldest in the British Commonwealth Overseas and granted the Royal patronage and the prefix "Royal" by King George VI in his coronation year—with seven faculties: Theology, Laws, Medicine and Surgery, Dental Surgery, Engineering and Architecture, Arts, Science. It has, as we have seen, its own Nobility with their Committee of Privileges. It is an ecclesiastical Province whose Archbishop exercises jurisdiction since 1944 over the bishopric of Gozo, previously immediately subject to the Holy See since its formation in 1864. And in the history of this microcosm has been mirrored the life of the great world around it.

Viewed as a part of the British Commonwealth, Malta is unique in two particulars. It is the only British possession whose Government owns an Opera House and in normal times maintains an annual opera season and conducts the pawnbroking of the nation in the manner of certain Continental states.

9: Luke G-5 (ca. 1920-ca. 1960) 1960
EZ6 Malta EZ6

states. Alone with Gibraltar it runs a Lotto (with weekly drawings) as a Government Department. Until 1866 Malta's Opera House was the Manoel Theatre, a little gem of a playhouse built as the Court Theatre by Grand Master Manoel de Vilhena in 1731 and believed to be the oldest theatre in Europe. It is easy enough to appreciate how daintily graceful it must have looked when the audience, arrayed in the brocades and perukes of the eighteenth century, was assembled to witness some comedy of Molière or Goldoni. Later used as a cinema, it is now being scientifically restored to its original form and purpose.

In 1866 the new Opera House, officially called the Theatre Royal, was completed at a cost of £60,000 just within Kingsgate, partly on the site of a dilapidated old bakery which has been identified with the house of the Turcopilier, title of the Pillar or Head of the Langue of England. In 1873 this building, which was designed by Barry, the architect of the Covent Garden Theatre, in a style which while dignified was entirely out of harmony with Valetta's prevailing architectural character, was seriously damaged by fire and was reconstructed at a farther cost of £20,000. Before its destruction in the Second World War it was the only theatre known to the writer where it was the rule for male members of the audience to attend the evening performances either in mess dress or in evening dress with decorations.

The Monte di Pietà, the Government pawnbroking Department, was established at the end of the sixteenth century and was housed in its present handsome office in Merchants' Street by Ximenes, the last but two of Malta's Grand Masters. Connected with the Monte di Pietà is an institution known as the Monte di Redenzione. In wandering about the island the visitor will occasionally encounter a building of the seventeenth or eighteenth century adorned with a shield representing three cones surmounted by the letter "R". These buildings constitute the property, now administered by the Government of Malta under a trust, of